

2/27/08

TESTIMONY TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE on Proposed Bill 5608

Joseph Jaskiewicz , Mayor of Montville, CT

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter; members of the Public Health Committee

I am Joseph Jaskiewicz, Mayor of the town of Montville, Connecticut, and I am here today to speak regarding Proposed Bill 5608, *An Act Concerning Issuance of Liquor Permits to Casinos that Permit Smoking in the Casino*. I want to complement the work of our regional legislators who drafted this proposal, their hard work that attempts to striking a balance on this difficult issue is to be commended.

I speak to you today as the chief elected official of the town where the Mohegan Tribal Nation and Mohegan Sun Resort are located, and someone who has built a strong and enduring relationship with the Mohegan Tribe. That relationship has been built on regular and ongoing communication about issues that affect both the town of Montville and the Mohegan Tribal Nation, and a willingness to cooperate and compromise when the need arises. I believe we have been good neighbors to one another, and with mutual respect and communication, we will continue to be.

I urge you to think carefully about any proposal before you and the impact it could have on the community in these difficult economic times. The Mohegan Sun has made significant strides in limiting second hand smoke in the casinos. I am concerned that any proposal that is not created on a government to government basis could lead to protracted litigation and damage a relationship that has existed for generations.

If the state takes the step of trying to enforce a ban on smoking in the casinos, it seems clear from what has happened in other states – as nearby as Atlantic City – that it will have a negative impact on business.

In times like these, I believe the legislature should be doing all it can to foster and support business, not create roadblocks.

A downturn in business could devastate eastern Connecticut. We have already seen thousands of layoffs at Foxwoods and other businesses in the region. I have been very pleased to see that Mohegan Sun has been able to avoid layoffs so far. But that could change if this issue is not handled with a tone of mutual respect.

Connecticut's Native American tribes have been generous with the state of Connecticut. Their resort businesses employ thousands of our citizens and neighbors, and their revenues have supported our state budget.

I certainly appreciate the concerns about second-hand smoke, but I strongly urge you to reach a compromise on this issue like the one reached with the Mohegan Tribal Nation in January...a compromise that does not threaten the good government to government relationships we have established, and one that will not jeopardize business in times like these.